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Teaching Brazilian Portuguese and Culture Through Authentic Videos and Readings of *Crônicas*

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Teaching Brazilian Portuguese and Culture Through Authentic Videos and Readings of *Crônicas*

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Dedication

To Seth, Nica and Cala

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Abstract

Teaching Brazilian Portuguese and Culture Through Authentic Videos and Readings of *Crônicas*

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This report investigates the use of authentic readings and videos to teach Portuguese language and culture in the foreign language classroom. It starts with a discussion of the current state of the field about definitions of culture, their pedagogical implications and some approaches to teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. This discussion is followed by a review of recent research supporting the use of authentic videos and films to teach the target language and culture concomitantly, and a thorough description of the Brazilian literary genre of *crônica,* based upon the works of preeminent Brazilian literary critics and historians. The report ends with a unit design proposal based on the literature reviewed and grounded in second language acquisition theories and research. The proposed innovative approach that incorporates authentic non-scripted videos and literary readings, such as *crônicas*, provides a strong support to teachers that seek to teach cultural perspectives as well as products and practices in the foreign language classroom.

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Introduction

My eighteen-year experience teaching Portuguese to foreign language learners has been very fulfilling, but has also presented some challenges. The biggest challenge of all has been finding materials for teaching the Portuguese language and culture, in particular for the Intermediate level. To fill this lacuna, I have often created my own teaching materials with the goal of increasing my students' motivations to learn; prompting them to analyze and compare oral vs. written forms of Portuguese discourse; and improving their vocabulary as well as their reading, writing, listening, and oral skills in the context of Brazilian culture. I also wanted to provide them with interesting and enticing readings that would instill a love for Brazilian literature.

One of my main sources of inspiration for creating materials has been *crônicas*, a specific Brazilian literary genre that is short and pleasant to read and is reflective of Brazilian culture. The *crônicas* often intersperse traditional grammar in the narrative with accurate reproductions of oral language in the dialogues. Because they are short, humorous, and "easy" to read, the *crônicas* have been widely used in Brazil to introduce middle-school students to Brazilian literature (myself among them). They have also been used in some Portuguese as Foreign Language textbooks. For these reasons, I started using *crônicas* in my intermediate-level classes at The University of Texas at Austin. It did not take me long to realize that, apart from being a valuable teaching resource, my students greatly enjoyed reading them.

The *crônicas*, however, are not as straightforward for Portuguese learners. They require scaffolding from the teacher. First, this genre uses many colloquial expressions and slang, which are often unfamiliar to language learners. Second, and most importantly, students generally misunderstand several essential passages from the stories not due to

the language itself, but due to the socio-cultural references, which are very "natural" for native Brazilians, but inaccessible to many foreigners. To help my students understand colloquial language, I developed glossaries. I also resorted to long explanations and examples about Brazilian society to fill in my students' socio-cultural gaps. These clarifications helped my students understand the *crônicas* better, and would often make the author's irony and social critique more accessible to them. However, although this method worked, it also seemed insufficient for me. My students were getting all the explanations from only one representative of the Brazilian culture. But the way I see my culture is not necessarily the way all my compatriots would see it. People from different generations, gender, professions and parts of the country would certainly have a different view of Brazil and speak the Portuguese language in a different way. I decided then to add a video component to my materials based on *crônicas*. I filmed several different Brazilians talking about themselves and the cultural topics that derived from the course readings, and then broadcasted them in the classroom. My goal was to give my students an opportunity to learn the Portuguese language by being exposed to input from Brazilians from different parts of the country. They could also learn about the Brazilian culture through their voices.

My experiences using these video-based materials in my classroom motivated me to write this report. I wanted to find research support and suggestions for incorporating videos/films and readings, such as *crônicas,* to teach language and culture concomitantly in the foreign language classroom. This report reviews my findings, and proposes an innovative approach to teach culture and language through the use of *crônicas* and authentic videos.

The report is organized in four chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the concept of culture and the constructs that have informed recent research about teaching culture in the

field of foreign language education. Chapter 2 reviews recent research about the use (and benefits) of commercials, videos, and feature films to teach the target language and culture. Chapter 3 describes the Brazilian literary genre of *crônica* through the works of preeminent Brazilian literary critics and historians and provides a strong support for using this genre to teach the Portuguese language and culture to foreigners. Chapter 4 proposes an innovative lesson design for intermediate learners of Portuguese in which a *crônica* is used as a springboard for language and cultural learning. The lesson is enhanced with suggestions for activities and non-scripted video materials to support the learning of cultural concepts embedded in a *crônica*. I argue that these videos and the proposed activities help scaffold learners' access to the *crônica*, thereby enhancing their opportunities to learn the Brazilian culture and language.

Chapter 1: Culture

This chapter addresses theoretical frameworks and goals for teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. The first section reviews the field's definitions of culture and their pedagogical implications. The second section discusses some approaches to teaching culture in the foreign language classroom.

Defining Culture in the Field of Foreign Language Education

Many scholars and foreign language teachers refer to culture in terms of the distinction between big C culture and little c culture. Big C culture is often associated with the grand themes of civilization, such as classical literature, the fine arts, historical figures, government, and history; while little c culture refers to the lifestyle, daily thinking and behaviors, and everyday types of culture, such as food, habits, transportation, etc. (Wintergerst & McVeigh, 2010). Peterson (2004) uses the analogy of an iceberg to deepen the big C/little c distinctions: the tip-of-the-iceberg, its visible part, is "the first thing people are aware of encountering" (p. 19). However, 80 percent of an iceberg is hidden under water and represents the "invisible and usually unconscious characteristics of culture" (p. 20). According to Peterson, both big C and little c culture have a visible and an invisible part. Examples of little c invisible aspects would be popular issues, opinions, and preferences; the visible aspects would be gestures, clothing, food, hobbies, etc. Some examples of big C invisible aspects are core values, beliefs, legal foundations; and examples of visible aspects are architecture, geography, classical literature, etc. Although some scholars (e.g., Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005) consider the big

C and little c distinction, which was born in the late 60s and earlier 70s, to be outdated, these terms are is still currently used to a great extent in the United States to talk about culture.

In 1996, the *National Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (ACTFL, 1996) proposed a new concept of culture in the field of Foreign Language Education. This document advocated that the teaching of a foreign language should include the "Five Cs"—Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities—and that learners can only master the foreign language when they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs (ACTFL, 1996, p. 3). Therefore, in the category of Culture, the concepts of "big C" and "little c" cultures were replaced by a new tripartite model, also known as the "Three Ps": cultural perspectives, cultural products, and cultural practices. The perspectives are defined as the "underlying beliefs and values of that culture;" the products may be tangible ("a painting, a piece of literature, a pair of chopsticks") or intangible ("an oral tale, a dance, a sacred ritual, a system of education") and the practices refer to "patterns of behavior accepted by a society" and represent the knowledge of how to act in specific situations (ACTFL, 1996, p. 6). The three components of this model interact and influence each other. According to Tang (2006), because this tripartite model places the perspectives at the top of the pyramid, it emphasizes the importance of the meaning systems of a culture, marking their role as "shaping their cultural products and fostering the ways people in the culture behave and interact with each other" (p. 90). The Standards, then, incorporated and expanded the Big C/little c model by proposing to focus on the underlying values, beliefs, and attitudes that generate the cultural products and practices.

It is also imperative to point to another dimension of the intersection of language and culture: language may vary according to a specific situation (e.g., formal vs. informal setting; oral vs. written) or group (e.g., jargon used by lawyers; slangs that parents do not understand, etc.). As Schulz (2007) puts it, culture can be understood as a system of patterned behavior:

> This definition acknowledges that cultural patterns are systematic and shared, that they express culture-specific meaning; that they differ according to such variables as gender, age, ethnicity, race, education, power, income, religion, region, and other social and geographical variables; and that cultural patterns can change over time. (Schulz, 2007, p. 12).

In a similar token, Levy (2007) points out that culture can be seen as a group membership (which includes a speech community) but also as an individual concept, as there is individual variation regarding cultural perspectives and interpretations, and the teacher's and learner's understandings of their own culture will inevitably be an individual interpretation as "culture is both a manifestation of a group, or a community, and of an individual's experience within it" (p. 105). In parallel, the interpretation of the target culture also has an individual dimension. For example, when reading a target language text, learners make interpretations based on their own experiences, dialoguing personally and silently with the author (Fisher, 1996).

There is a lack of consensus on what acquiring the target language culture really means and how it should be taught and assessed in the foreign language classroom (Schulz, 2007). In addition, there is no firm agreement on the definition of culture. As Wintergerst and McVeigh (2010) posit, "culture is a far-reaching dynamic concept and an elaborate, ever-changing phenomenon. There are many ways to look at it" (p. 3).

Approaches To Teach the Target Culture

Some foreign language educators teach the L2 culture as a separate entity from the language curriculum (e.g., national holidays, traditional clothes, etc.). To others, this treatment of the target culture would be impossible, as they view culture as intrinsically related to language (Hadley, 2001; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005; Schulz, 2007). When teaching a specific language, one also naturally teaches a specific culture; they are indissociable.

In fact, language and culture are so interconnected that users are not always conscious of the cultural elements present in speech. Some scholars propose that foreign language educators should raise students' awareness on how culture affects people's daily lives and language by encouraging them to act like ethnographers who describe, explore, and understand the new culture through inquiry (Wintergerst &McVeigh, 2010). In a similar vein, Fisher (1996) suggests that learners take the role of "explorers"—those who make an effort to inquire and to question assumptions and that learn by others as participant observers—rather than "tourists" who expect to receive factual information from the guide, do not question assumptions, and avoid an interpretation of another social reality (p. 75). This approach sees the target culture learning as an ongoing, dynamic process that students engage with and not the mere acquisition of factual information (Schulz, 2007). Moreover, this perspective puts the learner in the center of the apprenticeship, as s/he is encouraged to use the language as a "tool to access and process information in a diversity of contexts (Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005, p. 359)" and in this process discovering the discrete viewpoints of the target culture.

In order to convey these principles, several scholars propose using authentic resources, such as videos (Garza, 1991; Herron, Cole, Corrie, & Dubreil, 1999; Winke, Gass, & Sydorenko, 2010); commercials (Martinez-Gibson, 1998; Wildner-Basset, 1997); feature films (Bueno, 2009), and readings (Nostrand, 1996; Porto, 2003; Scott & Huntington, 2002; Stewart & Talburt, 1996), as teaching materials.

Yet, despite the framework provided by the National Standards and the proposed approaches, scholars continue to report that teachers often fail to integrate culture in the foreign language curriculum (Byrd, Cummings, Hlas, Watzke, & Montes Valencia, 2011; Schulz, 2007; Tang, 2006). Back in 2001, Hadley attributed teachers' failure to integrate culture to their lack of time in an overcrowded curriculum; their fear to teach culture because they feel they do not know enough about the subject; and the fact that it involves dealing with students' attitudes, which may include ethnocentrism and stereotypes. Surprisingly, still today, with an increasing number of resources for teaching culture and for accessing authentic materials (via the internet and the new technologies), teachers continue to find it challenging to teach cultural perspectives in the language classroom. After analyzing survey responses from 415 foreign language teachers and 64 teacher educators about the teaching of culture in the foreign language classroom, Byrd et al. (2011) concluded that both groups found the "perspectives" as the most challenging cultural dimension to teach over products and practices. Tang (2006) remarked that there are few, if any, materials created to teach a foreign language and the discourse patterns associated with the points of view of its native speakers. Teachers would perhaps feel more at ease with teaching culture in the classroom if there were innovative materials that taught the foreign language and culture concomitantly and that showcased the target culture products and practices as well as the cultural perspectives of the native speakers. Using authentic films and readings can be a good starting point to tackle the teaching of

the foreign language and culture. The next chapter reviews recent research about teaching the target culture through videos and films.

Chapter 2: Teaching Language and Culture through Authentic Films and Videos

This chapter offers an overview of the use of authentic materials in the field of Foreign Language Education and reviews recent research supporting the use of commercials, videos, and feature films to teach the target language and culture in the classroom.

Authentic Materials in the Context of Foreign Language Education: a Brief Overview

Swaffar and Arens (2005) propose a holistic approach for university level foreign language teaching in which students acquire cross-cultural literacy that give them, "the social and linguistics frameworks of texts and genres for spoken and written communication" (p. 5) that may occur across periods, cultures and multicultural frameworks. For the authors, authentic materials–written by native speakers for a native speaker audience–enable students to learn new language in the context of a culture's ideas, values and practices. This goal is not necessarily achieved through textbooks' contrived materials, which tend to present the language in isolated forms. As an example, the scholars mention how the descriptions of basic topics, such as home, eating practices, and shopping, are generally introduced in beginner's books through word lists or descriptions disconnected from social practices whereas authentic materials, such as foreign language movies, magazine articles or books excerpts, can illustrate various types of home interiors in the target culture and, thereby, help students visualize the different cultural contexts in which the vocabulary resides. Other ways in which beginner students can work with authentic materials are summarizing complex ideas from texts, videos, or listening passages into more fundamental linguistic units, or yet by being asked to

identify language choices to describe characters. To achieve negotiation skills in the foreign language, the authors suggest a sequence of assignments that move from comprehension to production (culminating in interactive communication), guiding the learner to reread and listen to cultural texts several times. Contrary to some educators that believe authentic materials are more appropriate for intermediate/advanced level learners, Swaffar and Arens claim that this multiliteracy approach should be introduced at the beginner's level and should be integrated to the whole foreign language curriculum.

Gilmore (2007) reviews some issues and research regarding authentic materials and authenticity. He points that although the use of authentic materials has been long used in foreign language learning, the debate over its role and definition has increased in complexity and now includes research from a wide variety of fields besides foreign language education. As a consequence, the concept of "authenticity" has been defined in a myriad of ways. Gilmore argues that, from the standpoint of the teacher, it is better to concentrate the debate on "learning aims" (p. 98) rather than on a pointless debate about the meaning of authenticity. In this perspective, he believes that the focus of the teachers should be on producing learners that are communicatively competent. In reviewing the literature that compares authentic and textbook discourse, the author concludes that the contrived materials of language textbooks often present learners with a scarce and distorted sample of the target language, whereas authentic materials, specially audio-visuals, not only offer a richer source of input but also can be exploited in different ways and levels to develop learners' communicative competence. In addition, authentic materials are better suited to teach language in context and to meet specific students' needs. Gilmore claims that it is essential to include the target culture (or cultures) within language teaching materials in order to develop intercultural awareness and communicative competence. Audio-visual materials, such as sitcoms, can be a good

medium to raise learners' awareness and understanding about the target culture and their own. However, these kinds of materials could be a disadvantage for non-native speaker teachers who do not feel very confident about the target culture. The materials, therefore, should be selected carefully, providing support for the teacher and keeping the specific needs of the students in mind.

Regarding motivation, Gilmore's (2007) review shows that most authors consider authentic materials more interesting than contrived ones, because they are intended to convey a message rather than highlight the target language. Other authors, however, believe that the difficulties associated with authentic materials (due to the vocabulary and cultural background knowledge presumed) may, in fact, demotivate learners. Most researchers use the term "authentic" to refer to books, films, newspapers and other materials that are culturally produced (and scripted) to a native audience, and this kind of discourse differs from the spontaneous conversation between native speakers, which can be considered unappealing/uninteresting to many students. Gilmore points out that, despite the belief that authentic materials promote motivation, there is still very little empirical support for this claim. Peacock (1997) performed a classroom research project to investigate whether authentic materials increase the classroom motivation of learners. The results indicate that although self-reported motivation increased, learners also reported that authentic materials were significantly less interesting than artificial materials, making it impossible to conclude if the authentic materials from the study motivated the learners or not. The study concludes that interest should be considered as a separate component of motivation.

Gilmore (2007) affirms that success of authentic materials motivating a specific group of learners will depend on how the teacher selects texts, creates tasks and mediates between these materials and the students. The author recognizes that finding appropriate

texts and designing tasks for them can be a very time-consuming and challenging process and requires some familiarity with academic research about authentic materials; few teachers have either the time or the access to this literature. Berardo (2006) points that the sources for authentic materials to be used in the classroom are infinite, although the most common are newspapers, magazines, literature, movies and songs. She claims that the Internet is the most useful source of these types of materials, as it is continually updated, more visually stimulating and very interactive, hence promoting a more active approach to reading. Berardo suggests that when selecting authentic materials, teachers should take into consideration that the aim should be to understand meaning and not form.

Among authentic materials, language teachers have been enthusiastic about using films and videos in the classroom. The next section reviews the literature on using authentic films and videos for teaching the target language and culture.

Research on Using Authentic Films and Videos for Target Language and Culture Instruction

According to Wildner-Basset (1997), television commercials can be a vehicle for "decreasing cultural and social distances" between foreign language learners and the target culture and native speakers. For the author, these high-context messages, or "culture capsules", enable even the novice student to travel to the target country without leaving the classroom. She points that cultural learning is a process rather than a collection of facts about a culture and that active commercials viewing guided by questions and discussions in class increases learners' motivation. She also suggests using open-ended questions in discussions, to stimulate students' own thinking and culture-processing skills

Martinez-Gibson (1998) conducted a study to assess learners' abilities to observe cultural differences between the target culture and their native culture as presented in a Sprite commercial—aired on Spanish television in 1993—and to investigate how the procedures to view the commercial affected the quality of the students writing in terms of content. The participants were undergraduate college students from a fifth semester Spanish composition class at an American university assigned to two groups: Non-Culture Discussion Group (NCD) and the Culture Discussion Group (CD). The CD group only did a pre-viewing activity about Spanish culture and its differences with American culture and a post viewing activity of brainstorming, filling a table of US versus Spain in terms of the food, clothing, and gestures they saw in the commercial. Both groups wrote, in 50 minutes, a 250-word composition comparing or contrasting the cultural differences between Spain and the U.S. as shown in the commercial. The author concludes that the pre- and post-cultural activities performed by the CD group improved not only their recognition of cultural variation between Spain and the US, but also the quality of students' writing.

Herron et al. (1999) investigated whether second semester university students of French as a foreign language learned culture from a video-based second language program taught by nonnative teachers of French. The material used in the three courses they researched was *French in Action*, a multimedia course that includes a textbook, a workbook, and videos in form of a teleplay similar to a soap opera. The French actors portrayed in the videos speak most of the time in normal speed and with various accents, and interact in "French cultural situations" (p. 521). For this study, the researchers used 10 videos from *French in Action* in a 15-week course. A post viewing quiz on cultural information about the video was administered, each time, immediately after the screening. In addition, all students took a multiple-choice pretest at the beginning of the

course that assessed general linguistic and cultural knowledge. The pretest consisted of 50 questions: 20 assessed little "c" knowledge, 20 assessed big "C" knowledge, and 10 evaluated grammar knowledge. Grammar acted as a distractor in the test so grammar scores were not included in the data analysis. A posttest, identical to the pretest, was applied at the end of the semester. The study found that scores on overall cultural knowledge were significantly higher on the posttest than on the pretest, suggesting that beginning students can significantly improve their overall cultural knowledge from viewing the videos and participating in activities from *French in Action*. In addition, both in the pre- and posttest and on the post viewing quizzes, little "c" knowledge was greater than the big "C" knowledge implying, according to Herron et al., that learners actually recall the social patterns of daily living better than the achievements and institutions of a foreign culture. Students' perceptions from the open-ended questionnaires support these findings, as they reported that they believed they learned more little "c" than big "C". The authors concluded that using videos to teach culture in the foreign language class is a positive experience and recognize that one limitation of the study was the use of one specific kind of video: a fictional narrative.

The integration of feature films and media literacy in the foreign language classroom and its effect in building learners' translingual and transcultural competence is discussed by Bueno (2009). She illustrates the interplay of these factors in developing courses and planning instructions with the feature film *Yerma* (Távora, 1998) for an advanced Spanish conversation and composition university course. Quoting Altman (1989), Bueno suggests that instructors have a fundamental role in providing support for students' comprehension. This support includes offering multiple viewing of film/scenes; manipulation of the delivery of the viewing (such as pauses, silence only, image only, etc.); choices of scenes with "high level of redundancy between linguistic message and

visual material;" providing background information and written strategies, creation of different activities to assure multiple exposure to the language and to the culture (Stephens, 2001) shown in the videos; and providing access to the script or target language and English captions for more difficult scenes. Moreover, Bueno points that other characteristics of film, such as gender and intertextuality, affect learners' abilities to "make cultural comparisons and gain insights into the products, practices and perspectives of the target culture" (p. 321). In describing her classroom application of the feature film *Yerma*, Bueno did the following to overcome challenges due to the length and complexity of the input: screened the film in 15-20 minute increments; provided in- and out- of class activities related to the film; prompted learners to work individually and in groups and to participate in role-plays, discussions and written and oral presentations; provided discussion of topics elicited by learners and instructor. Bueno acknowledges that some challenges for instructors integrating film in their university courses at the third and fourth year levels are: providing appropriate resources for the wide range of proficiency levels among the students; providing native (preferred by intermediate-low to mid-level of proficiency) and target (preferred by intermediate-high to advanced-low levels of proficiency) language captions; directing learners out-of-class interaction with the film; prompting multiple viewings of the segments; modeling interpretation strategies; and providing guidelines.

The above-mentioned benefits of using authentic videos in the foreign language classroom come with an extra (and not minor) bonus: the use of captions, i.e. on-screen target language subtitles (Garza, 1991). Garza (1991) investigated the comprehension of advanced university learners of ESL and Russian of the language of film and television segments and found that there is a positive correlation between the presence of captions and the increase in comprehension of the target language of the videos. In his study, he

carefully selected only "authentic" video materials, i.e., "materials that are originally produced in a given language for a native-speaking audience of that language, and not for learners of the language as a foreign language" (p. 241). The ten 2-4 minute long selected segments were transcribed verbatim and represented five different genres: dramatic feature film, light comedy feature film, news/documentary feature, animated feature, and music video. The results show that participants who viewed the videos with captions consistently remembered its content and used the original lexicon and lexicon collocations more than the ones who viewed the videos without captions. Garza concludes that captions may enhance the learning of a foreign language because they allow learners to employ their reading skills to strengthen aural comprehension. Captions increase accessibility to the salient language (and students can enjoy the same input as native speakers), allow students to use multiple language processing strategies, increase memorability of the essential language, and promote the use of new vocabulary in appropriate context.

Other benefits of captioning for foreign language learners include the visualization of what is heard, increasing language comprehension, deeper depth of spoken word processing, and facilitation of identifying word boundaries, i.e., segmenting chunks of language (Winke et al., 2010). Winke et al. investigated the effects of captioning in second- and fourth-year university learners of Arabic, Chinese, Spanish and Russian, who watched short videos with and without captions in randomized order. The videos used were prepared from three short English-language documentaries about animals (one was a National Geographic production). They were transcribed, translated and then dubbed into the four target languages by female native speakers. Target language captions were added to the videos. Results corroborate Garza's finding that captioned rather than non-captioned videos aid in new vocabulary recognition and in the

overall comprehension of the videos. Moreover, the authors suggest that "more input is better" (p. 79), as it increases the depth of processing and gives opportunities for different learning styles. The authors also found that the order of viewing captioned and non-captioned videos had an effect on vocabulary recognition presented in the aural mode--learners presented with captioning in the first viewing performed better – and attributed this to the role of attention in learning a second language, as captions helped learners to determine what to pay attention to in subsequent viewings. To make captions even more beneficial, they suggest more specific strategies, such as rehearsal and practice of what is seen in the captions. One topic suggested for future research is how the learners themselves perceive the need for captions.

In the research reviewed above, the term "authentic," as referring to videos/film, was used loosely and has different definitions for different authors. For Herron et al. (1999), *French in Action* soap opera videos are authentic because they show native French actors, with different accents, speaking in normal speed in "French cultural situations" (p. 521). One limitation of this kind of material is that the videos are scripted, and the "cultural situations" are created by the author of the videos. The learner does not discover a cultural trait; s/he is guided to it. The French actors convey different regional accents, but they do not "voice" the personalities and different points of view of these native speakers Feature films, commercials, and television programs (such as those suggested in Bueno, 2009; Garza, 1991; Martinez-Gibson, 1998; Wildner-Basset, 1997) were produced for the native-speaker audience, and in this sense, appear "authentic;" yet, they were also scripted. The documentaries used by Winke et al. (2010) were voiced only by female speakers (one per language). Thus, there is a research gap, to the best of my knowledge, regarding the effects on non-scripted videos on L2 learners' culture and language development, whereas "authentic" means native speakers talking to other native

speakers, and in which the language used is true to normal speech speed, with the repetitions, hesitations, pauses, interruptions, change of thoughts, slang language, colloquialisms, and "mistakes." In other words, showing how native speakers really speak in their daily lives.

This chapter discussed the different aspects that make authentic films and videos a good vehicle to teach the target language and culture. Another vehicle that has been widely used to teach culture is literature. "Arts are the truly authentic expression of culture and literature is the most explicit, the richest in verifiable evidence" (Nostrand, 1996). According to Nostrand, literature is even more rewarding and a better means to teach culture in the foreign language classroom when the author sees his/hers culture critically. The next chapter focuses on a specific Brazilian literature genre, *crônicas*, as it portrays the products, the practices, and the perspectives of Brazilian culture. A comprehensive discussion of other literature genres and their cultural expression is beyond the scope of this report.

Chapter 3: *Crônicas*

This chapter describes the Brazilian literary genre of *crônica* through the works of preeminent Brazilian literary critics and historians, and provides a strong support for using this genre to teach the Portuguese language and culture to foreigners. The first section defines the literary genre of *crônica*. The second section provides a succinct chronological review of how the *crônica* was implemented in Brazil. The last section describes the characteristic features of *crônica,* and explores how they can be used to support learning about Brazilian culture and language in the Portuguese classroom.

WHAT IS A *CRÔNICA*?

Ask any educated Brazilian to tell you what a *crônica* is and they will unhesitatingly say: a short text originally published in a newspaper or magazine that is very pleasant and easy to read. Ask the same question to a Brazilian literary critic and the answer might not be so simple. Partially because a *crônica* can be written in very different styles, Brazilian literary critics (Arrigucci, 1987; Candido 1992; Rónai, 1971) maintain that it is hard to define the genre. *Crônica*s may resemble dialogues, *contos* (fictional short stories), expanded anecdotes, or poems (Candido, 1992). Some are similar to an essay, others to a commentary (Rónai, 1971), a satiric narrative, a confession, or yet a lyric expression. Even some well-known and beloved Brazilian *cronistas* (writers of *crônicas*) have a hard time defining the written genre that made them famous. Clarice Lispector, one of the most famous Brazilian writers, world renowned and respected for her highly introspective novels and short stories, and also a journalist and a *cronista,* reflected about her métier in dialoguing with the reader in a *crônica* titled *Ser cronista*:

"Is the *crônica* a descriptive narration? A talk? The summary of a state of spirit? I don't know (…)" (Lispector, 1984, p. 155).

Because it lies somewhere between the objectivism of journalism and the subjectivism of literary creation, the *crônica* can be seen as a hybrid genre (Lopez, 1992). For Neves (1995), the *crônica* is a "polymorphic genre" since the choices of its themes are arbitrary; and its form is kaleidoscopic, fragmented and subjective. The author affirms that the sum of a writer's *crônicas* is produced like a mosaic. Precisely because the *crônica's* style can be so diverse, there are several characteristics that define its genre. However, before we discuss these characteristics, it is important to understand its origins and development over time. The following section provides a succinct chronological review.

The Chronicle of the Brazilian *Crônica*

In its original meaning, a *crônica* was a historical narration in a chronological order (Rónai, 1971). In this version, the first cronista in the Portuguese language was Pero Vaz Caminha, Portuguese navigator who, in a long letter to the Portuguese king Dom Manuel, narrated, through faithful direct observations, his "discovery" of the Brazilian land and its people in 1500 (Sá, 1985). From that letter to the production of contemporary cronistas, much has changed. Yet, something remains: the inherent relationship of *crônica* and time. *Crônicas* vary over time, along with changing perceptions of time. A *crônica* is always, in a way, a product of the "social time" (Neves, 1992).

Crônicas are not necessarily unique to Brazilian literature. The genre that started in Europe has spread throughout Latin America, and Argentina in particular (Rotker, 1992). But for Brazilian literary critics, *crônicas* can be considered a Brazilian genre

(Rónai, 1971) due to the "natural" and "peculiar" form that it has "acclimated" in the country and the originality of its development in Brazil (Candido, 1992), where they became very expressive in the range of Brazilian literary production (Arrigucci, 1987).

The origin of the *crônicas* can be traced to the *feuilleton*, which originated in 1836 in France (Brayner, 1992), and started in Brazil during the second half of the 19th century, with its height in popularity at the turn of the century. The *feuilleton* was a small column, at the bottom of a newspaper page, where Brazilian writers published novels in installments to amuse the readers weary of the daily news. This column could also contain short essays, articles, poems, and short stories (Sá, 1985) that focused on aspects of modern life and was therefore "the page through which the literature entered in the newspaper" (Arrigucci, 1987). Through the *feuilleton*, several important Brazilian writers (novelists, poets, playwrights) started or solidified their careers.

To better understand the role of the *feuilleton* in the implementation of the crônica as a Brazilian genre, it is important to contextualize the turn of the century within Brazil's rapid historical and political transformations. In the 1880s, Brazil was an Empire and Rio de Janeiro the national capital. In 1888, the country saw the abolition of slavery and the following year the proclamation of the Republic. In 1890, there was a huge wave of immigration (to substitute the slave labor force). The country was in the process of an accelerated transformation and modernization and intellectuals, politicians and the population in general registered their admiration for technology so the country would assume the modern appearance of a European metropolis (Cardoso, 1992).

Modern Times, Technical Innovations: the Newspaper, the Photography and the *Crônica*

According to Sussekind (1987), the technical innovations that appeared almost simultaneously and were disseminated in Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century

influenced the quotidian life and transformed the literary technique of the most active Brazilian journalists and writers at the time, since the ways that newspapers were produced, conceptualized, and published exponentially changed. Small, simple structured newspapers gave way to large-scale enterprises destined for the mass public. As a consequence, Brazilian literature, disseminated through the *feuilletons* and *crônicas*, reached a much larger audience than ever. In addition, economic ties linked journalism and literary production at the time: the newspaper offered regular salaries and a decent pay, being the only avenue for professionalization to writers. But working for a newspaper meant also working for editors-in-chief, who would demand that the language be more uniform and clear, and would oppose the overuse of adjectives, scientific lexicon, and picturesque regionalisms that were common in Brazilian literary production of the time. In addition, these cronistas were also influenced by the journalists' craftsmanship: they had to learn to write with velocity (in comparison with the time devoted to a novel without a deadline), and condense the quotidian of urban life into the allotted space of their column, as if it were an "instant" photograph.

The rise of photography, with its peak in 1910, did not change the pictorial technique of the fine arts, but suggested a thematic restriction for formal academic painting: painting now served to depict idealized images (allegories of historical or religious genres), unable to be captured by the photographer, while photography was consigned to documentation. In the same vein, while other forms of literature of that period were obsessed with the rhetorical dramatization of the narrative; the *crônica* sought to register the moment. "The cronista is a photographer," agrees Bastos (1992). In fact, according to Sussekind (1987), the cronista Pedro Kilkerry named the two columns he wrote in 1913, as *Quotidianas* (Quotidians) and *Kodaks*.

Due to these influences, the *crônica* started to abandon the rhetorical ornamentations typical of this literary period, paring down its language and becoming more concise and precise, conscious of the newspaper's immediacy and spatial limitations (Sussekind, 1987). According to Candido (1992), the *feuilleton* gradually changed form, coming to be what nowadays we call a *crônica* around the 1930s. However, Rónai (1971) points out that, as of 1971, the term "*crônica*" was not even in a Portuguese dictionary, and renowned Brazilian literary critics were still debating if it was or not a literary genre, or yet a minor genre. This debate is, to some extent, still going on today. Now that we understand the context in which the *crônica* emerged and became "Brazilianized," let us examine its characteristics.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE *CRÔNICA*

1. Capturing the Moment: A Narration of the Present

According to Rónai (1971), the starting-point of the *crônica* is always the present time or present situation (*a atualidade*). Being either an event of general interest or a very particular occurrence, "either a revolution that turns everything upside down or a bit of a conversation heard in the street," (p. 155). What drives the *crônica* is the contingency of the moment. For the cronista, even the most ephemeral facts gain certain concreteness, and the reader is reminded that the reality is made of "small strokes" (Sá, 1985). Some *crônicas'* themes might be the most mundane: habits, behaviors, fashions, the problems of the moment, advertising slogans, urban concerns. *Crônica* "encompasses the totality of life" (Rónai, 1971, p. 156). Many times cronistas write about an event that happened to them, or reflect on a simple fact of life. However, the cronista is always aware that a particular situation will only interest the reader if it works as a metaphor for universal

situations; therefore, the cronista represents a collective being with whom the readers identify (Sá, 1985). Brayner (1992), showing how these characteristics are present in Machado de Assis's *crônicas*, adds that this genre can be seen as tip of an iceberg, where a small space signals the existence of a vaster sphere. The cronista starts talking about a subject that ends up taking the reader to another, more complex one, although the reader does not always perceive that. The simple, direct, sometimes informal language that many times seems like small talk can deeply pierce not only the depths of human behavior and sentiment, but also deliver social critique (Candido, 1992). It is in this context that, during the abolition, Machado de Assis chose to portray, in farce, the situation of the freed man, liberated from slavery but still oppressed by the miserable salaries of the free market. Candido (1992) argues that underneath Machado de Assis's humorous and ironic tone was an acute critique of the oligarchic system of the time.

Rónai, who to the best of my knowledge was the first literary critic to write about the *crônicas*, insightfully predicted in 1971: "without a doubt, the historians of the future will resort to crônicas to reconstitute the physiognomy of Brazil of our time" (p. 156).

2. An Image of a Social Era: the *Crônica* as Historical and Sociological Documentation.

"*Crônicas* can constitute the testimony of a life, a document of an entire epoch or a means to inscribe History in the text" (Arrigucci, 1987, p. 52). For Brazilian historian Neves (1995), *crônicas* are considered documents for the historian. They are intrinsically related to history, as both cronistas and historians construct memories and shape identities: the former are authors and the latter interpreters of the collective memory). Through Brazilian *crônicas*, the reader can perceive the country's historical and political moment, or the "spirit of the time" (Neves, 1995, p.23). In this sense, as we have seen, the *crônicas* from the turn of the century dealt with the end of Monarchy, installation of

the Republic, abolition and modernization of the country. In the 1920s and 1930s, when the *crônica* was consolidated as a national genre, the *crônicas* reflected a search for national identity, accelerated industrialization, intense urbanization and the constitution of an integrated economic system (Dias, 1995; Neves 1995). During the 1940s, they reflected the country's optimism. Between 1945 (end of the dictatorial New State) and 1964, they were marked by an effervescent discussion about the country's destiny. During the military dictatorship and its concomitant censorship of the press (1964-1985), they were more discreet, obliged to resort to extraordinary subtleties (Neves, 1995). In the 70's, the narrations reflected the influence of TV–its fashion, slang, shows, and worldview–in Brazilian society, criticizing, at times, the "hegemonic television mentality" of the middle-class (Dias, 1995). Nowadays, the *crônicas* express the fears and hopes of a fragmented city and country (Neves, 1995).

3. Urban Matters: the *Crônica* and the City of Rio de Janeiro.

As noted, the *crônica* registers "the snapshots of modern life, overpowering news, casual encounters, frenzied incidents, shocking stimuli of the quotidian of the big cities" (Arrigucci, 1987, p. 63). There is a consensus among the Brazilian literary critics and historians that *crônicas* are an "urban" genre par excellence (Arrigucci, 1987; Brayner, 1992; Dias, 1995; Gomes, 1995; Neves, 1995; Ronái, 1971; Sá, 1985) with, of course, some noble exceptions to the rule (for example, João Ubaldo Ribeiro writing about the small Itaparica Island in Bahia for the newspaper *O Globo* every Sunday during the 1980s). As we have seen, *crônicas* were originally published in newspapers and magazines, and, the most important Brazilian ones were localized in the big cities. Although there are several important authors who wrote *crônicas* about São Paulo, Porto

Alegre and other big Brazilian cities, there is a very strong link between the genre of *crônica* and the city of Rio de Janeiro:

> There is no question that the crônica is a modality of the urban literature but in the Brazilian case there is this peculiarity: it is in Rio de Janeiro that the genre was born, grew up and fixated itself. There are exceptions, in this case Mário de Andrade (…) we have to recognize that it is easier to find in our newspapers correspondents that speak about New York or London than cronistas who write about other cities of the country." (Resende, 1995b)

There are political, geographic, economical and cultural reasons for the importance of Rio de Janeiro to Brazil, and more specifically of Rio to the *crônicas*. To start, Rio was the capital of the country for two centuries (from 1762 to 1960). At the turn of the century, when the *crônica* was being born in Brazil and the country was going through an accelerated process of modernization, the city of Rio was going through a transformation as well, with the transition from the Empire (1822-1889) to the Republic (1889-1930). And it was in Rio de Janeiro that the most important newspapers and magazines were located. When the cronistas were narrating the present moment and documenting the quotidian of their time, the scenario, most of the time, was the city of Rio de Janeiro, and the protagonists the *cariocas* (something or someone from Rio de Janeiro). This was not the case only at the turn of the century: "the author might not be from Rio" wrote Rónai (1971), referring to the famous Brazilian writers who migrated to Rio in the 30s and 40's to work for the city's newspapers, "but their pages forcibly reflect the carioca moment" (p. 156) In fact, continues Rónai, the *crônica* reflects "Rio de Janeiro as it is seen by Brazilians from all the other states" (p. 156). According to Resende (1995b), the characteristics that define the *crônica*, can be the same that define Rio de Janeiro and its inhabitants: spontaneous and relaxed language, without affect; a tone of intimacy and complicity; a short and sometimes rushed breath; the frequent presence of humor; and almost always, an affinity for pleasure.

Rio de Janeiro is no longer the political capital of Brazil, but it is still a beacon of the nation (Neves, 1995) given its political and cultural importance. It is, however, important to note that, when the cronistas are talking about Rio, they many times are, metonymically, talking about Brazil; so that often Rio de Janeiro and Brazil can be "interchangeable terms" in the analysis of *crônicas* (Neves, 1995; Resende, 1995b).

To historian Neves (1995), the *crônica* is "the memory of the city," as it reveals its geography and culture. Through the old *crônicas* we can revive old stores, bars, trees and neighborhoods that might not exist any more; through the present *crônicas* we can keep current about what is going on in different corners of the city. The different neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro are a constant theme for the cronista. Rubem Braga wrote constantly about Ipanema. Paulo Mendes Campos wrote about Leblon. João do Rio wrote about Copacabana. Marques Rebelo wrote extensively about Rio's different neighborhoods, trying to find a sense of unity, an elusive cohesion. To Rebelo, Rio is a city with many cities within and each of the city's neighborhood has its own personality: Jacarepaguá is an example of integration with nature, Lapa of the bohemians of the past, São Cristóvão is the symbol of Imperial times and Copacabana, once a paradise, is a neighborhood "synonymous with a perverse and disastrous modernity" (Gomes, 1995).

The divisions within the city of Rio de Janeiro is a recurrent theme for Brazilian intelectuals. If Lima Barreto in 1921 criticized the government of the time for splitting Rio in two cities, "one European and one indigenous," in 1994 Zuenir Ventura still made waves talking about a divided Rio in his book, *The Broken City* (*A Cidade Partida*) (Resende, 1995b). Analyzing Rebelo's work, Gomes (1995) sees a multiple and fragmented city, not only for its physical aspects:

> Urban progress does not engender a totality. There is the permanence of a traditional, conservative Rio. There is a city that wants to be modern, but is superimposed onto another one. (…) [in Rio] various forms of cultures coexist, distant from each other by life styles, costumes, traditions, moral conceptions that are different and many times antagonistic (Gomes, 1995, p. 156).

Resende's analysis corroborates this affirmation. She sees the city of Rio as a "plural" city, a "city of differences." And to preserve this unique city, the cronistas have been "decisive mediators, shapers of public opinion, spokespeople of the city but also of Brazil" (Resende 1995b, p. 56).

4. Language: Simple, but not Simplistic.

> And without noticing, while I was writing for here [the newspaper], I was becoming too personal (…). Another thing I have noticed: as soon as I know that I am writing for the newspaper (…) and not for a book, my way of writing is transformed. (Lispector, 1984, p. 156)

Those are the words of Clarice Lispector in the aforementioned *crônica* "Being a cronista" (*Ser cronista*), published in 1968 in Rio's newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*. In her reflection, she feels that when writing a *crônica* she needs to "speak to the readers" and please them; and her writing style becomes lighter and entertaining. In the newspaper, the *crônica* is competing with all the news and information of a large newspaper or magazine. To catch the readers' attention, the cronista has to use some artifices: "The cronista, I think, develops the vice of pertinence, of wanting to be always interesting to grab the reader, which is his first obligation. He sacrifices everything to be clear, and, whenever possible, alluring," says famous contemporary cronista Luis Fernando Verissimo ("A Palavra Revisada," 2002, p. 77). To gain the readers' attention, the cronistas put themselves close to the reader, writing to their audience as if they were speaking to them: "Although, by definition a printed genre, the *crônica* is, paradoxically, always a sample of the spoken language, a repository of the colloquial language" (Rónai, 1971). The cronista seeks the "orality in the writing" (Candido, 1992), trying to write

"naturally" (Arrigucci, 1987; Candido, 1992), using a simple and communicative language, purposely avoiding being pompous and not always respecting formal writing style.

When writing a novel, a writer, at least theoretically, is not constrained by space or time: s/he can write a short or a long novel, and take the time to find the inspiration, to write, rewrite and revise the manuscript. This is not the reality of the cronistas: they are limited by space (the short size of their column, usually 30-60 lines, according to Rónai, 1971) and pressed for time: the newspaper goes to press everyday, and the cronistas must keep the pace of their weekly, biweekly and many times daily column. The rigid economy of space forces the cronista to enrich the text's structure. In order to narrate a complexity of fast-paced events in a small column the cronistas need an agile rhythm, writing and "eliminating excesses" at the same time (Sá, 1985). Verissimo mentions that, compared to writing a novel, the *crônica* is harder, because "you need to be concise, and do not have the space to explain yourself better" (*A palavra revisada*, 2002). Needless to say, this apparent "simplicity" and "naturality" does not mean unfamiliarity with the artifices of language; quite the opposite, it requires a lot of talent to be concise, and finding the exact words to communicate in a "simple," light way. The colloquial language in a conversational tone is not directly transcribed into the *crônica*; it is recreated, carefully constructed by the cronista. Without talent, "pages that are supposedly light become as heavy as a Statistics thesis, the present situation becomes an anachronism and the jokes fall into a vacuum" (Rónai, 1971, p. 156).

One might think, affirms Candido (1992), that all the *crônica* has to offer is amusement, distraction or entertainment. But behind the *crônica*, he points out, there is a lot of richness to be explored: "for being light and accessible, maybe they communicate more about people in their quotidian life than an intentional study" (p. 19). He concludes

that one can learn a lot while having fun, and the *crônicas* are a privileged vehicle to attract, inspire and enhance our vision of the world.

5. Humor and the social critique.

As mentioned earlier, *crônicas* are written to be light reading, and the use of humor is certainly one characteristic of this genre. Through humor, however, the reader can identify and reflect on important aspects of the country, stimulating his critical capacity. In the context of the *crônica*, and in a way, of the carioca style, humor is used as a powerful tool for social critique and reflection. Analyzing Fernando Sabino's work, well known for his humorous *crônicas*, Sá (1985) points out how in many humorous *crônicas*, the author might abandon the direct dialogue with the reader and the narrator might assume its "fictional mask." That distancing, affirms Sá, permits the writer to be more at ease to explore the humor of situations that better exemplify the tragicomic side of urban reality, and the laughter is an easy-going way to examine certain contradictions in society. As we have seen here, several important cronistas have used humor to make social critiques, including Machado de Assis, João do Rio, and Luis Fernando Verissimo, to cite just a few.

6. Natural, but for Whom?

Literary critics agree that the language and writing style of the *crônica* is "natural." In fact, a closer look reveals that this term is used several times. In Candido (1992), it appears at least five times: as "the language that speaks closest to our most natural way of being" (p. 13); as the "natural way" by which the *crônica* adapted to the Brazilian context (p. 15); in Brazilian literary context, where superior intellectuality was identified with grandiloquence and grammatical refinement, the *crônica* performed miracles of simplification and naturality (p. 16); *crônica* seeks the "proximity with what

is the most natural in the way of being of our time" (p. 16). Arrigucci (1987) also mentions the term several times: *crônica* so "naturally" acclimated in Brazil that it looks like a Brazilian genre (p. 51); cronista Manuel Bandeira writes "very naturally" in a colloquial tone as if chatting with the reader (p. 54). What is interesting to observe is that the authors consulted for this work are Brazilians (literary critics or historians) writing for a Brazilian audience, except for Rónai (1971), whose work is an introduction to a collection of *crônicas* published for students of Portuguese as a foreign language. A foreigner himself (he was born and lived part of his adult life in Hungary, learned Portuguese by himself and came to Brazil as a war refugee, and remained there the rest of his life), Rónai is the only one that points to the fact that, what might be very "natural" for one society, might, precisely for this reason, be "untranslatable" for the foreign student:

> I thought about compiling two or three dozen crônicas, chosen carefully, to form an Introduction to Brazil for interested tourists and literate immigrants. The only reason I did not present this idea to any editor was because I convinced myself in time that its realization would have a serious obstacle. Indeed, the sentimental travelers that would most benefit from reading this compilation do not know Portuguese. Because one of the unmistakable characteristics of the crônica is precisely its near untranslatability. So rooted is it in the land where it blossoms, so related to its environment, to the linguistics habits of its milieu, to the surrounding social reality that, translation into any foreign language would require numerous erudite foot notes to clear up misunderstandings and references, and would contrast profoundly with another characteristic that is fundamental to the genre, its lightness. (Rónai, 1971, p. 156)

Rónai also mentions that, for representing orality in the written text and using colloquial language, the *crônica* is "a real gold mine for Portuguese students from other nationalities" (p. 155).

The next chapter offers a pedagogical application for the use of *crônicas* in the foreign language classroom. Instead of the "numerous erudite footnotes" to clarify misunderstandings and to give contextualization to the narrative, the lesson resorts to short, lively videoclips of Brazilians speaking about the *crônica's* topics, and suggest several engaging activities (listening comprehension, oral, written, reading, vocabulary and grammar) that guide the learner into the story, the language, and the country.

Chapter 4: An Example of Pedagogical Application

This chapter proposes a unit for Intermediate learners of Portuguese. This unit suggests teaching the Portuguese language and the Brazilian culture concomitantly through a reading—"Zona Norte, Zona Sul," a *crônica* by Luis Fernando Verissimo (1994)—and authentic videos of Brazilians from different regions and walks of life discussing the socio-cultural topics embedded in the text. For a summary of this *crônica*, please refer to the Appendix.

DIFFERENT READINGS OF THE *CRÔNICA* "ZONA NORTE, ZONA SUL"

To make a critical reading of a *crônica* and to discover the several layers of the discourse, affirms Sá (1985), it is necessary to reread it many times, interpreting each passage until obtaining a holistic understanding. In a first reading, "Zona Norte, Zona Sul" might be interpreted as a funny anecdote, in which a married woman (Vânia) and her boyfriend's (Rogério) planned affair fails because a burglar, the police, and the media get in their way. In a second reading, students might pick up on some Brazilian daily habits, such as drying clothes in the *área de serviço*, using buses and not cars as a means of transportation (sometimes spending several hours to go from work to home). They might also learn that not all areas of the city are served with the same infrastructure (Vânia would need two hours to go from Grajaú to Copacabana to go shopping). In subsequent readings, students might arrive at another level of interpretation: the *crônica* could also be talking about two sides of the city (*Zona Norte*, represented by Vânia, and *Zona Sul,* represented by Rogério) that are different, but in need of each other. However,

just like Vânia and Rogério's love affair is never consummated, these two sides of the city fail to really integrate, too. Between them, there is the city's criminality (represented by the bandit Gatão, whose clever chosen nickname is an association with an agile, slithery cat and a sexy man[1]), the aggressiveness and incompetence of the police (the police invade Rogério's apartment to capture Gatão, but the bandit flees easily, taking Vânia with him), the media (that transformed the failed capture into a spectacle), and the overwhelming influence of the TV in the Brazilian society (the fact that Vânia appeared semi-naked on the TV obfuscated her husband's realization that Vânia could be having an affair with Rogério).

Verissimo's *crônica* depicts a multiple and fragmented city, in which different forms of cultures and lifestyles coexist (Gomes, 1995), a city that is unique because it is "plural" (Resende, 1995b). Even if the *crônica* touches on very serious issues of the time and makes an acute social critique, its reading is extremely humorous. And this is another facet, not only of the *crônica*, but also of Brazilian culture in general: using humor and wit to talk about very serious matters. The following section describes how these different readings of the *crônica* can be made accessible to Portuguese language learners.

UNIT PROPOSAL FOR "ZONA NORTE, ZONA SUL"

To scaffold students' reading comprehension of "Zona Norte, Zona Sul," its social critique, and the language used by the author, I propose dividing the unit in four

[1] *Gatão* is the augmentative of *gato*, which literary means "cat" in Portuguese. *Gato* is also a slang for a very handsome or sexy man.

sections: Backdrop, Reading, Grammar, and Zooming In. Each section has a specific goal and rationale. What follows is a description of suggested non-scripted videos and activities that students can watch and do in the different sections of the unit.

Section 1: Backdrop

Purpose: To activate background knowledge (i.e., provide context) and fill in some cultural gaps so students can understand all passages of the reading.

Rationale: In "Zona Norte, Zona Sul," the main character, Vânia, transits between the neighborhoods of Grajaú (*Zona Norte*)[2] and Copacabana (*Zona Sul*) in Rio de Janeiro. In order to fully understand the story (and its humorous social critique), students need to learn that *Zona Norte* and *Zona Sul*, besides being geographic subdivisions of Rio, carry strong socio-cultural connotations. Another crucial point in the story is that a burglar gets into Vânia's boyfriend's apartment, spoiling their romantic encounter. To understand how the burglar got into the apartment without being noticed, students need to know that an *área de serviço* is typical in many Brazilian apartments. It is a kind of a laundry room, with the difference that it most often has an open window, as Brazilians, even when owning a drying machine, tend to also air-dry their clothes on a line (*varal)*. A further scenario rich in cultural underpinnings takes place when Vânia and her boyfriend end up being broadcasted on national TV. When Vânia's husband (together with their children and the entire *Grajaú* neighborhood) watches her, he feels proud (and not mad by her

[2] In the crônica, the author does not mention that Grajaú is in *Zona Norte* and Copacabana in *Zona Sul* of Rio de Janeiro.

betrayal as one might expect) because she looks like Dina Sfat. Obviously, we need to know who Dina Sfat is to get the joke, the irony, and the social comment of the influence TV has on Brazilians.

Suggested Non-Scripted Videos and Activities:

1. Students can watch a video of a Brazilian literature professor speaking about *Zona Norte* and *Zona Sul,* and do activities that help to pinpoint her discourse organization and monitor the video's comprehension. By doing these listening comprehension activities, students will be able to fill in some cultural gaps. For example, they might learn that *Zona Sul*, closer to Rio's downtown and touristic beaches, is the "postcard" of the city and is identified with tourism and the upper-middle class. *Zona Norte*, the old industrial area of the city, is an emblem of the Brazilian mix, and is where the *samba* was born. These cultural and social differences constantly interact with each other, and both are needed to form the *carioca* identity.
2. Students can watch a video or see a picture that shows a traditional Brazilian *área de serviço,* and do an activity in which they are asked to describe and compare this space with what they have in their houses.
3. Students can watch videos of Brazilians from different generations talking about the very famous Brazilian actress Dina Sfat (now deceased), and do an activity that will enable them to locate the *crônica* in its "social" time (mid 70s, early 80s).

4. Students can watch a video detailing the author's life, his writing style, and the *crônica* as a genre, and do an activity that will prepare them to recognize the crucial elements of a *crônica* as they do the reading.

Section 2: Reading

Purpose: To introduce students to Brazilian literature through a *crônica*. By doing the reading, students will learn new vocabulary, new grammar structures, and different aspects of Brazilian culture and society.

Rationale: To scaffold students' reading comprehension, the activities in this section should focus on raising students' awareness of discourse structures; developing students' reading comprehension skills, and grammar and vocabulary knowledge. Activities a little above students' capacity should be included to enhance group and class discussion, thereby also providing opportunities to develop students' oral skills.

Suggested Activities:

1. Students can do activities that will help in building awareness of discourse structure (Grabe, 2008), such as identifying the main characters of the *crônica* and finding adjectives to describe them, ordering jumbled paragraphs that summarize the story, and being prompted to retell the story in their own words.
2. Students can expand their vocabulary by doing exercises based on the new words they have learned through the reading. They can do activities in which these words are repeated in multiple contexts (such as a fill-in-the-blanks text that

describes the story) as well as exercises that prompt them to produce sentences with the new vocabulary.

3. Students can do activities to raise metacognition awareness as a strategy for comprehension (Grabe, 2008) by, for example, answering questions about how the burglar got into Rogério's apartment, or being asked to discuss passages in which the author uses humor and irony to talk about the characters and/or Brazilian society. They could be asked, for instance, to describe the influence of the TV in Brazilian society and identify where that information appears in the reading.
4. Students can also learn some "questioning the author" (Grabe, 2008) techniques, by doing activities in which they will discuss, for example, the author's writing style (they could be asked, for example, to identify in the readings some of the *crônica*'s characteristics that were mentioned in the Brazilian literature professor's video), his sense of humor (by doing an activity that asks them to transcribe passages in which humor is used) and his choice of characters' names (for example,. why did he chose the name Gatão for the burglar?).
5. The students can complete activities that ask them to voice their opinions about the reading. In addition, they can do activities where they are asked to identify the cultural elements of Brazilian society and prompted to compare these elements with their own culture(s).

Section 3: Grammar

Purpose: To review or be introduced to grammar topics (verb tenses, complex grammar structures) that appear in the readings and/or the videos and that are challenging, or need to be targeted for instruction at the Intermediate level. Analyze grammar structures, as they appear orally vs. written.

Rationale: In this section, students can review and analyze the verb tense Conditional, known in Portuguese as *Futuro do Pretérito* (Future of the Preterite) in the context of the *crônica* "Zona Norte, Zona Sul." In other words, they can review grammar as part of text comprehension (Grabe, 2008) and discourse analysis. This particular verb tense appears several times in the text. Students can be prompted to discuss what this verb tense expresses in the context of the reading.

Suggested Activities:

1. Students can be asked to reread the *crônica* and underline all verbs in the Conditional tense, analyzing why it was used in each passage. Next, they can be asked to discuss, with their peers, why the author used this verb tense so many times in the reading. Through these class discussions, students will be able to understand that the Future of the Preterite (that corresponds somewhat to the conditional "would" in English) can be used to refer to the future from the perspective of the past (as in "*he said that he would call her tomorrow*"), which expresses a plan or an intention about the future that will not necessarily happen.

When students analyze this verb tense in the context of the reading, it will become clear to them that the characters had planned, in the finest details, everything that would happen in their first romantic encounter. The recurrent use of this verb tense brings humor and irony to the text as, in fact, nothing that had been carefully planned really happened because a burglar, the TV and the press got in the way of the two characters. By doing this activity, students can not only review and practice this verb tense, but also reflect about the fact that by using this verb tense several times in the text, the author transmits humor and irony.

2. Students can do activities in which they are asked to analyze other meanings of the Conditional. For example, the Conditional in Portuguese can also be used to express surprise, indignation, suppositions, etc.
3. Students can also do a pragmatics activity in which they are prompted to compare oral versus written discourse by analyzing one sentence from the *crônica* where the author uses language that is typical to oral Portuguese.
4. Students can do activities for reinforcement and practice the Futuro do Pretérito. For example, they could create their sentences or paragraphs using this verb tense in its different meanings.

Section 4: Zooming In

Purpose: To discuss in greater depth some socio-cultural topics that arise from the reading through the voices of different Brazilians and do several activities including compositions and oral expression; listening and reading comprehension; and pragmatics,

vocabulary, and grammar exercises that prompt students to relate the videos with the readings.

Rationale: To gain a better picture of Brazilian society, students should analyze the several topics discussed in the *crônica*. Questions they might ask during the analysis include: How do different inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro perceive the north and the south? Do they have similar opinions? Do they speak in the same way? What chores can be done in an *área de serviço*? Who does these chores? Is breaking into a house a common crime in Brazil? How does the TV influence Brazilian society? Is this similar or different to the U.S.?

Suggested Non-Scripted Videos and Activities:

1. Students can watch videos in which different inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro (such as a manicurist, a yoga teacher, a domestic worker and a hairdresser) describe the *Zona Norte* and the *Zona Sul*. Next, with the purpose of deepening the discussion from the previously watched video of the professor explaining the north and the south part of the city, students can do an activity to analyze the difference in opinions, of discourse (e.g., academic vs. colloquial), and of vocabulary used.
2. Students can watch a video where one inhabitant from the south dialogues with one from the north and do activities in which they are encouraged to analyze their expressions and body language and reflect on their interaction. Is there tension when they discuss this topic?

3. Students can watch several videos in which different Brazilians describe their *área de serviço* and how they use this part of their apartments. They can do activities to find out what is in there exactly, what specific chores are done there, who uses it and who does not, and why it has that name.
4. Students can watch a video in which a carioca tells how her apartment was robbed, when the burglars got into the *área de serviço,* and what she did. Students can then do an activity that prompts them to compare this testimony to the *crônica*.
5. Students can watch videos (and do activities) about the influence of TV in Brazilian society, in particular the consumer market, and the status of being on national television, even if it is to be shown saying something silly.

This unit exemplifies how language and culture can be taught concomitantly through authentic readings and videos while using the four strands suggested by Nation and Macalister (2010). Through the described activities, students will be receiving meaning-focused input (readings, videos), meaning-focused output (peer and class discussions, answering to open ended questions, writing short summaries and compositions), language-focused learning (working with vocabulary and grammar structures) and fluency development (role-plays with negotiation, in class discussion).

Conclusion

There has been an effort recently in the field of Foreign Language Education to teach culture through a tripartite model: cultural perspectives, cultural practices, and cultural products. Recent research shows that the cultural perspectives of native speakers is the most challenging to teach, partially because there are few, if any, materials to support the teachers in this endeavor. My teaching experiences, confirmed by the literature reviewed in this report, indicate that authentic videos and readings are excellent resources to create such materials.

Research shows that using commercials, videos and feature films from the target language in the classroom increases learners' motivation, decreases their cultural and social distances, enables them to make cultural comparisons and expand their cultural knowledge about the target culture, improves their listening and writing skills, and expands their vocabulary. In addition, when captions are available, reading them while listening to videos increases learners' depth of processing, promotes their recognition and production of new vocabulary, and addresses a wider range of learning styles. The literature review of the Brazilian *crônica* shows that this genre is embedded in Brazilian culture. The *crônicas* capture the social time and diverse facets of Brazilian society and culture and can be read as historical documents. In addition, they are short and pleasant to read and are a good vehicle to analyze and compare oral vs. written forms of Portuguese discourse, a much needed discussion for the language learner. For these reasons, *crônicas* are ideal resources to teach Brazilian culture and the Portuguese language concomitantly.

This report proposed a pedagogical unit that uses non-scripted videos of native speakers voicing their own experiences and opinions about Brazil and Brazilian culture. The videos support the reading of a *crônica*. Additional suggested activities scaffold

comprehension of these resources and enhance the learning. This innovative approach may provide support to teachers that seek to teach cultural perspectives as well as products and practices in the foreign language classroom.

Appendix

SUMMARY OF THE *CRÔNICA* "ZONA NORTE, ZONA SUL"

Vânia finally agreed to meet Rogério in an apartment in Copacabana. She insisted on complete discretion: no one could see her arriving or leaving the apartment. She was afraid her husband Antônio would find out about her affair with Rogério. Rogério reassured her that no one would see her and they carefully planned their first encounter. Vânia would tell her husband that she would go shopping in Copacabana. The round trip by bus from Grajaú would give them two marvelous hours.

In order not to be noted, she exaggeratedly dressed in a coat, a shawl covering her nose and mouth, sunglasses and a scarf around her head. Everybody in the street turned to see the woman who walked so bundled up on such a hot day.

She arrived nervously at Rogério's apartment. He took her to his room and they started to undress. At that moment, they heard a commotion in the corridor. Vânia thought it was Antônio. Then they heard a strong knock on the door and, when Rogério opened the door, his apartment was invaded by several policemen with machine guns that were looking for a famous burglar named Gatão, who had fled from the apartment next door through the *área de serviço*. During the search in Rogério's apartment, the policemen opened a closet and found Vânia there. She fled towards the kitchen and accidentally fell in Gatão's arms. Gatão held Vânia and threatened to stab her if the police approached them. He demanded a car to flee. The police decided to meet the burglar's requests.

At this point the photographers and TV crew arrived and filmed the scene. A reporter interviewed Rogério and asked him questions about the nature of his relationship

with Vânia. The car that Gatão had demanded arrived and the burglar fled, taking Vânia with him. In Grajaú, Vânia's children see her on TV and call their father.

The author proposes two alternative endings. First: Once they are far from the city, Gatão releases Vânia. Afraid of Antônio, she decides to live with Gatão in Rezende, and never to betray him. Second: Vânia comes home scared, but willing to face the consequences of her escapade. Her neighbors, children, and even her husband are thrilled by her appearance on television. Antônio, proud and smiling, compares Vânia with Dina Sfat.

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